"Was I afraid to get up and speak my mind? No, I wasn't": The Feminism and Art of Jewish Orthodox and Haredi Women

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"Was I afraid to get up and speak my mind? No, I wasn't": The Feminism and Art of Jewish Orthodox and Haredi Women An Introduction

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The 2018 documentary *93Queen* by Paula Eiselt shattered the conventional depictions of religious women. Avoiding the trappings of voyeurism and fetishization that so often characterize the representation of women in traditionally Orthodox communities, the film offers a critical exploration of a group of Haredi women's efforts to create the first all-female emergency medical response team, Ezras Nashim.[1] This documentary is part of a wave of film, art, and literature that seeks to represent Orthodox women from inside their religious communities. The artists, often religious women themselves, explore the ways in which their subjects are pushing at the traditional patriarchal structures that have confined and controlled women's behavior. Significantly, these works examine women's modes of empowerment without disavowing the religious frameworks in which the women are operating. Thus, a distinction is created that nuances the difference between religion, and men's use of religion to limit women.

At the heart of *93Queen* is the question of whether the women of Borough Park advocating for female emergency technicians (EMTs) see themselves as feminists. Frequently, they deny the label in public spaces, on the radio, and in print. Yet Eiselt's intimate knowledge of the community allows her to frame the problematic phrasing of the very question to expose the conflict that exists in contemporary understandings of feminism within the religious community. Ruchie Freier, who emerges as the driving force behind the women's emergency medical service, explains in the documentary that *feminist* is a term that is associated with secularism, which for the Haredi world

means the forsaking of Judaism. Thus, for these women, who are dedicated to observing the commandments [mitzvot], feminism is contrary to their religious and social commitments. To admit to being feminist would be to reject their religion and community.

Ironically, it is not only religious women who have found the conception of framing their advocacy as "feminist" problematic. For many secular feminists, the notion of *religious feminism* is an oxymoron. In the 1970s, American feminists began arguing that monotheistic religions were inherently oppressive to women as a result of their androcentric norms; this argument has been extended to claim that monotheism introduced patriarchy. Some respondents used these ideas as a catalyst for conceptualizing a feminist theology, while others saw agnosticism, atheism, or a turn to spirituality outside traditional religious frameworks as alternative feminist paths.[2] There is a wide spectrum of positions on the relationship between women and traditional religious structures, from those such as feminist philosopher Christine Overall, who considers feminism to be incommensurable with monotheistic religion, to those who build on Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005), which argues for the recognition of non-Western religious women's agency.[3] Yet even across this spectrum of critical approaches, religious women who remain deeply committed to pietistic communities are often still viewed as complicit in their subjugation, and therefore disempowered. From this perspective, there can be no feminism where women willingly submit to a historically male-dominated system that excludes them in the highest community roles as decision makers; has increasingly been erasing the images of women from the public space and the pages of newspapers; and continues to emphasize laws of modesty that lead to severe restrictions in women's clothing, behavior, and mobility. The stigmatization of religiously observant women who continue to belong to male-led communities has consequently made women's activism for female rights within their communities nearly invisible outside of their communities. Problematically, this invisibility means liberal feminism's embrace of Haredi women is limited to those who are empowered by leaving their traditional, religious communities.

A rejection of religion, because of the damage it causes to women's lives, prevails in popular culture. Despite the major revisions of women's roles in many, if not most, religious communities during the past fifty years, and the many studies indicating that women can experience both fulfillment and oppression in deeply pious communities, religion continues to be held up as incorrigibly misogynistic. The rejection of religion on feminist grounds was exemplified by the "liberation narrative" of the bestselling 2012 book *Unorthodox*, Deborah Feldman's memoir of leaving the repressive Satmar Hasidic community in Brooklyn, which was made into a hugely successful and widely discussed Netflix series in 2020.

The outpouring of public opinion pieces and reviews of the Netflix series was divided. For many viewers and critics, the story signified a "stunning escape" from Orthodoxy, with the series deploying visual metaphors to capture women's physical and psychological oppression within the religious world.[4] In some cases, these images are picked up as highly symbolic of women's oppression by commentators. For instance, the *New York Times* notes, "The thin eruv wire that surrounds the Satmar Hasidic community where she [Esty, Feldman's fictional stand-in] lives might as well be an Iron Curtain."[5] The symbolism of the eruv, the wire that is meant to permit observant Jews to carry on the Sabbath, marks the opening scene, serving as a visual representation of the protagonist's imprisonment. Yet an eruv actually has *no place* in the life of Williamsburg's Satmar Hasidism, as the custom was rejected by their rebbe, Rav Zalman Leib Teitlebaum. Indeed, for many insiders decrying the series, historical and religious inaccuracies in *Unorthodox* undermined the personal narrative of a single individual and instead generated a strawman of religious oppression.[6] Thus, we see that the false and heavy-handed metaphor serves the ideological interests of the series' creators while demonstrating their ignorance of the community they seek to lambaste. Such narratives serve to demonize religious communities and women's oppression within them; these depictions are then juxtaposed with women's supposed freedom in the secular world. Moreover, the fictional plots invariably elide the existence of sexism, gender discrimination, and gendered violence in the wider world.

Unorthodox has company in other provocative stories about insular religious groups that serve to bolster convictions about the cultural superiority of secularism.[7] Moreover, the plots are frequently reinforced within the diegesis of the artistic text, with stereotypical and negative portrayals of the religious communities as not only limiting and oppressive, but also violent. Trading in such representations has become a staple of literary and cinematic renditions of religious women generally, and Jewish women in particular. Dominating this convention is the trope of the observant Jewish woman whose romantic sexual liaison with a non-Jewish man liberates her from the community and frees her artistic talents. While Netflix's *Unorthodox* may offer the most recent example, as Esty becomes involved with a young musician from Berlin and suddenly emerges as a talented mezzo soprano, this pattern can also be seen in many other works of fiction, such as the novels *Jephte's Daughter* (1989) by Naomi Ragen and *Jerusalem Maiden* (2011) by Tali Carner, as well as the films *The Governess* (1998), *A Price Above Rubies* (1998), *Esther Kahn* (2000), and *Félix et Meira* (2014).[8]

This trend of framing religious women only through their oppression is also reflected in the academic scholarship on Orthodox and Haredi women, which has historically focused on their disenfranchisement inside institutional systems.[9] While decades of Jewish women worked to reinvent Judaism through a feminist lens, Orthodox and Haredi women were imagined to have stagnated in a patriarchal bubble because of their observance of practices such as *niddah* [family purity laws] and their exclusion from many social practices and religious obligations observed by men. Orthodox and Haredi women do not constitute members of a prayer quorum and have limited religious obligations to participate in prayers and synagogue rituals. These limitations, in turn, have led to women's formal exclusion from both religious and legal leadership roles within their communities. Since religious observance is an all-encompassing worldview within these circles, women's marginalization from decision-making positions, as well as the determination of their obligations by all-male authorities, has been seen as a fundamental obstruction to their emancipation and a central pillar of their subjugation.

In the past decade, scholarship has sought to situate religious Jewish women's choices over their observance within narratives of empowerment;[10] to recognize the development of particular areas of intellectual engagement within traditional religious contexts;[11] and to view religious women's activism in light of specific community-related politics and activism.[12] Following from work in sociology, anthropology, and religious studies in the early 2000s that complicated and nuanced contemporary ideas about women within religious communities, particularly through the use of ethnography, these newer texts identified clear feminist strains in Orthodox and Haredi women's choices, even in the most traditional and stringent communities.[13]

This special issue developed from our curiosity about the dynamic feminist art and activism taking place within traditional Jewish circles and their near erasure in the popular imagination by those outside their communities. Over the last two decades, we have observed the growth of significant artistic and cultural movements, the emergence of new schools and programs specifically geared toward religious women, and the increased showcasing of these women's talents in public venues outside the boundaries of their religious communities. Traditionally observant women are increasingly developing an artistic and cultural language for representing narratives of the self, creating a toolbox of images that serve as an articulation of their complicated, intersectional personhood. The complexity of finding an *I* in social structures built around concepts of *we* serves as a driving force for negotiating art and politics as they have developed in Western culture, with a personal voice that remains embedded within pre-Modern concepts of community, devotion to God, and personal sacrifice.

There is no one Orthodox community, just as there is no singular religious Jewish female experience. What links these Orthodox communities, however, is an adherence to Jewish law, which allows for differences of interpretation but limits the kind of radical innovation that characterizes other streams of Judaism. These communities laud traditional gender roles, which create both physical and psychological barriers for women. Yet in the last thirty years, women have been engaged in religious and social developments that would have been unimaginable even a generation

earlier. Thus, feminism within Orthodox Judaism is about finding a path that allows women to advocate for their needs and rights within halakhically supported frameworks. Religious women's interventions within the closed societies of their religious communities mark a prima facie example of the turn in contemporary feminist studies to understand and develop strategies around the intersectionality of oppressions. Orthodox women engage in multiple conflicts that are different from those of both secular women and religious men. The women's efforts to contest the status quo must be seen as operating within a doubly disadvantaged position, characteristic of Third Wave feminism. The challenge is particularly acute in a community in which the language surrounding womanhood exhorts a woman's "special status"; valorizes her role in traditional female, domestic, and child-rearing tasks; and signifies women as "more spiritual," a key goal for the communities in general. Orthodox women's feminism lies in the intersection between these ideals and women's realities. As with other communities of women, they have been engaged in battles for healthcare, protections from domestic and physical abuse, divorce rights and child custody, alimony and child support. But they must also contend with issues particular to the community: social confinement; professional, educational, and financial restrictions; patriarchal oversight of their dress; the complexity of religious laws around sexual relations; limitations on physical movement, physical activities, artistic acts, and political participation (particularly in environments that consider women's modesty a religious imperative which participation in these acts threatens); and the gendered Jewish laws around marriage and divorce.

Consistently, scholars have pointed to educational advancements for women as catalysts for the social changes within Orthodox communities.[14] A growth in Jewish girls' education began in Britain and later France (and their colonies) from the early nineteenth century, and these models became foundational for today's Modern Orthodox communities.[15] Yet it is the introduction of the Bais Yaakov movement in Krakow, in the aftermath of the First World War, which played an important role in establishing Jewish girls' education for Haredi women. Its founder, Sarah Schenirer, a woman who was divorced, childless, and played important activist roles within the

community, has herself become an icon and role model for women within Haredi circles seeking alternative ideas of traditional Jewish womanhood. Though radical in its day, providing both elementary and secondary institutions for girls, the Bais Yaakov schools would become synonymous with the conservative values of Orthodoxy, the *limitations* of girls' education, instead of the possibilities. Yet it continues to provide both secular and Jewish subjects to Haredim: a bold move in conservative circles where male education, particularly in secular subjects, is to be found increasingly wanting.

As Modern Orthodox education began to develop separately, and increasingly include coeducation classrooms, the study of religious texts in their original format, including the Tanakh (Hebrew bible), commentaries, Mishna, and Talmud (legal religious source materials) would become available to girls and women, too. These moves in the 1970s in the United States and during the 1980s in other parts of the world, would create a highly educated and Jewishly literate group of women who were in other avenues of their lives pushing against gender boundaries. It was only a matter of time before the fight for equality in educational and professional spaces would leak over into the religious sphere, predicted by Blu Greenberg, an activist in the cause for bringing together Judaism and feminism, and the first president of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance (JOFA).[16]

Within the Haredi community, there have been fewer efforts to formally bridge the gaps between Judaism and feminism. As a result, even when religious women are highly educated and receive a tertiary education in secular subjects, the expectation within these traditionally observant Haredi communities has been that women will work in order to financially support their families, thereby enabling their spouses to engage in extended religious study. Such ideas prove complicating for feminists who view education and work outside the home as both fundamental rights for women, and as a potential path to empowerment, particularly when that work is in white-collar professions. Yet given the Haredi value system that *allows* women's work as a way to further facilitate man's religious study, a burden is imposed on women who are obligated to sustain the family. Thus, even that which is valued in feminist circles as the *empowerment* of women is seen as an obligation imposed on women

within Orthodoxy that further binds them to a patriarchal and oppressive religious system. As Naomi Graetz explains in her study of women and religion in Israel, "Even though Jewish law is often protective of women, it discriminates against and patronizes them."[17] This is because women ultimately remain excluded from the areas that matter most in religious life: full participation in religious and legal spheres.

Studies of Jewish feminism, which should offer a clue to resolving the tensions between traditional patriarchal religious structures and women's egalitarianism, have often focused on streams of Judaism (Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist) in which women's empowerment has predominantly occurred by rejecting traditional systems, preferring to innovate new traditions and modes of religious observance.[18] At the heart of these changes in the non-Orthodox sphere has been efforts to create egalitarian religious practices, which formally allow women the same participation as men have traditionally been permitted. Among many significant results of these efforts are mixed rather than segregated seating in the sanctuary space; women's ordination as clergy; increased focus on the Jewish education of females; full inclusion in the practice of Jewish ritual; and the ability of women to serve as judges in religious courts.

By contrast, Orthodox streams of Judaism (Modern Orthodox, Haredi) continue to claim a "separate-but-equal" stance. This notion argues that genders have different rights and obligations. Spaces within religious sanctuaries remain segregated; men and women always sit separately. Women do not have full inclusion in ritual. And according to a 2017 ruling by the Orthodox Union (OU), the largest Orthodox Jewish organization supporting synagogues and youth movements within the United States, women may still not serve as congregational rabbis.

But these limitations belie the radical changes that have been taking place for women within all branches of the Orthodox community. Female prayer groups and meetings, particularly around female-centered religious holidays such as Purim or the celebration of the new moon, are common and widespread even among the most conservative religious groups. These changes have been even more dramatic among Orthodox communities. As social historian Adam Ferziger notes, since the 1970s, the education of

Modern Orthodox women has led to the emergence of "an elite group of women . . . both deeply committed to religious observance and in possession of expertise in Talmudic study that exceeded the norm among Modern Orthodox men and women alike. By and large, rabbinical authorities associated with the Modern Orthodox community gave their support to this transformation."[19] This newfound expertise led to the rise of Orthodox Jewish women feminists such as Greenberg, who paved the way to women's increasing leadership within the Modern Orthodox community.

In Israel, through Nishmat: The Jeanie Schottenstein Center for Advanced Torah Study for Women, students can study and be ordained as *Yoatzot Halachah* [legal advisors], who can make legal determinations on matters of family law. These women are important decision makers and catalysts of change. Rachelle Fraenkel, a veteran Nishmat educator and the director of Matan's Women's Institute for Torah Studies, became internationally renowned when she spoke to the United Nations Human Rights Council about the kidnapping and murder of her son, Naftali Fraenkel, and two other teenagers, in 2014. Following the eulogies at Naftali's funeral, she rose with her husband and surviving son to recite Kaddish (the memorial prayer), receiving an "amen" from the chief rabbi of Israel. As *Haaretz* reported, "The Mourner's Kaddish has never before been recited in public in Israel by an Orthodox woman of such stature and in front of cameras."[20] Both the act and the tacit validation of the act by the highest religious authority in the country was unprecedented. Moves such as these indicate an increasing acceptance of women's adoption of religious rituals and legal powers previously denied them by religious social expectations, if not religious law.

An even more radical change was taking place on the Left in the United States. In 2009, Rabbi Avi Weiss and Rabba Sara Hurwitz—the first woman to be conferred with *smicha* [ordination] by Orthodox rabbis—opened Yeshivat Maharat, an institute for the religious study and ordination of Orthodox women in the United States. Now known as *Open Orthodoxy*, the most left-wing movement within Orthodox Judaism has been pushing for greater efforts toward egalitarianism for women within Jewish ritual.

With her ordination, and the granting of the title *Rabba*, Hurwitz caused a storm within the broader Orthodox community, who opposed

the use of a title traditionally awarded in its male form *Rabbi* exclusively to men. In an attempt to placate the angered authorities, the term *Maharat*, which was coined as a name for the yeshiva as well, became the title to indicate the ordination of future female students. An acronym standing for the virtues of religious leadership, *manhiga*, *hilchatit*, *ruchanit*, *toranit* [female leader of Jewish law, spirituality, and Torah], *Maharat* recognizes women's education and knowledge at the same level and standard as that acquired by men for the purposes of receiving *smicha*.

Some communal institutions began to employ these new Maharats, even as two of the largest mainstream bodies continued to oppose Orthodox women's ordination: the Orthodox Union (OU) and the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), the latter expressly rejecting the legitimacy of employing women clergy. However, the OU's 2017 statement offered a greater recognition that women were indeed increasingly filling roles that had traditionally been occupied by men with the requisite knowledge base and religious intentionality. According to Ferziger, "Veering away from previous negative evaluations of the entire Orthodox feminist endeavor, then, the 2017 ruling reflects a more nuanced religious picture; the emergence of Orthodox women who are capable of serving in positions historically associated with the rabbinate is celebrated, though the title *rabbi* and certain tasks portrayed as core clergy roles are reserved for men only."[21] Despite the OU's efforts to contain women's participation, the graduates of Maharat—one of whom offers a personal account in this volume—are continuing to serve in traditionally male clergy roles in synagogues, as well as less controversial roles in schools, hospitals, universities and Jewish communal institutions. And while some students are using the title *Maharat*, others have chosen alternate titles, including *Rabbanit*, *Rabba*, and *Rabbi*. "I am an Orthodox clergywoman, and I am changing my title to *Rabba*," Rachel Kohl Finegold, one of the spiritual leaders of a major congregation in Montreal, and part of the first graduating class of Yeshivat Maharat, publicly declared in *The Forward* in 2019. "A rabbinic title matters," she explained after having first used the title Maharat. "Let's be honest: one important reason this title was chosen was because it didn't sound like the word *rabbi*." For several years, while serving in a congregation

in Chicago where she had previously worked before her ordination, she accepted this title of *Maharat* that explicitly distinguished her role from that of the rabbi. But, during her employment in Canada, which she earned because of her qualification as a Jewish spiritual leader, and, with the support of her community, she adopted the moniker Rabba Finegold. Though most of these women have predominantly been employed for secondary roles in synagogues, in 2016, Lila Kagedan became the senior rabbi of the independent Orthodox Congregation Agudath Shalom, known as the Walnut Street Synagogue in Chelsea, Massachusetts.

Nor is it only the most radical wings of the Modern Orthodox movement that have seen a shifting in the attitudes toward women in leadership roles. Orthodox women were among a group who founded Women of the Wall, a multidenominational feminist organization based in Israel whose goal is to secure the rights of women to pray at the Western Wall and engage in singing, donning ritual garments and items such as *tallit* [prayer shawl] and *tefilin* [phylacteries] traditionally associated with men, and chanting from the Torah. They have met considerable resistance from Haredi communities in Jerusalem despite legal rulings entitling them to access for religious worship.

Less controversially, a program begun in Israel in 1996, and cosponsored by the OU, sends ambassadors to university campuses in the United States and Britain to help facilitate Orthodox Jewish life. This Jewish Leadership Initiative on Campus (JLIC) comprises a husband-and-wife team. The mission of these couples is to support religious life on campus, and while the husband is an ordained rabbi, "the wives are generally advanced graduates of one of the programs for women's learning in either Israel or the United States."[22] Although the program is steeped in traditional (heteronormative, hierarchical) mores, significantly, the wives are paid separately, a move that explicitly highlights their importance and marks them as distinct from their husband's parish and independently responsible for providing religious content and support to students.

Women within Haredi circles have also been directly impacted by some of these changes. Efforts to create ancillary duties such as director of community education, or youth director, also became necessary roles within Haredi communities and are increasingly filled with educated

women. The Chabad movement, with its tradition of sending emissaries [*shluchim*] throughout the globe as part of a program to reconnect unaffiliated Jews to Judaism, provides education and services for Jews in underserved communities and has long recognized the importance of both members of a couple being a valuable part of this arrangement. Moreover, they have even allowed women to be considered clergy "for the purposes of receiving the tax benefits resulting from parsonage statutes."[23] However, there have been no moves within Chabad or Haredi circles more generally to encourage women's ordination or rabbinical training. Yet women within these circles have also willingly adopted the language of feminism, often to critique the supposedly empowering world of secularity and liberalism, pointing to false values as well as problematic expectations and standards for women. These debates offer the opportunity to contrast what appears to be empty promises with the celebration of women's supposed special status within Judaism. Through its website, the Chabad movement has created a separate page, TheJewishWoman.org, which is replete with discussions of feminism within a religious framework, reflecting an awareness of the increasingly significant status of feminism in public discussions.[24] These articles serve multiple audiences, addressing religious women's need to frame feminism within a Torah-centered ideology; providing materials to rebut accusations that religion disempowers women; and speaking to those for whom feminism matters as part of its proselytizing activities.[25]

In *City of Joel,* a 2018 documentary by Jesse Sweet about the community of Satmar Hasidim who live in the village of Kiryas Joel in Orange County, New York, a Satmar woman is interviewed about her experiences of antisemitism and the conflict with a neighboring community. In response to a question that takes place off-screen about her oppression within Haredi Judaism, she responds:

> "Do I look like a woman who was suppressed? No, I don't. Was I afraid to get up and speak my mind? No, I wasn't. Did anyone tell me not to? No, they didn't. I'm a woman from the community. If I would need someone to go and protect my rights, I would go and ask for it. And I

> really don't appreciate anyone saying that they are protecting my rights, when indeed they are violating my rights of privacy."

Defying the idea that as a Haredi woman, she is silenced by the community or is maltreated or subjugated, this Satmar woman faces the camera with clear eye contact, a strong voice, and powerful pronouncements reflecting an internalization of Western feminist values. Yet a moment later she is seen in her kitchen, baking, where she declares, "Women are born to be modest. Females or women that are not modest, it's because they lost their natural sensitivity and natural talents and inclinations to be modest." For a liberal feminist audience, there is a stark contrast between the image of the strong, well-spoken, and *out*spoken orator and the traditional homemaker in apron and headscarf, espousing traditional gendered ideals. This scene in the film serves to question whether a woman within the Satmar community can be a feminist. The presentation of this traditionalism, with its fundamentally anti-feminist and anti-egalitarian account of women's behavior, contrasted with her earlier sentiments, allows the filmmaker to suggest to the audience that despite her ventriloquizing the language of feminist advocacy, the woman does not understand feminism. However, channeling Mahmood, one might also read this scene as empowering, seeing that even a traditionally observant Satmar wife has agency. Moreover, the borders between supposedly insular communities and the larger world are permeable; the woman is versed in liberal feminist ideas, which she, like other Haredi women, negotiates within the framework of her observance of religion in a highly patriarchal community.

Though women in the Haredi and Modern Orthodox communities are pushing at many of the traditional boundaries that limited their behavior and choices, the religious sphere remains the most controversial space for women's feminist engagement, precisely because it serves as a direct challenge to male hegemony. The recent inroads taking place here indicate that there is a groundswell in changes in women's actions and inclusion. As this volume was going to press, a landmark decision was made in Israel to allow women to take the rabbinical exams. This would enable women to receive the equal pay of men for several of the positions

in which they already serve. By making this an issue of education, the rules of gender equity could be applied. Though the Rabbinate has responded negatively to this decision, it is expected that the Ministry of Education will take over the administration of these exams, thereby recognizing women's knowledge in Jewish law and creating new paths for their participation in institutional Orthodox life.[26] What is most notable about religious women's feminism within the Orthodox and Haredi communities is that these women are displaying feminist agency in transforming aspects of their social and religious environments, while choosing to stay within the communities where they may act as agents of change.

This edited volume sets out to consider the contradiction that exists for religious women feminists, even if they may not use the term *feminist* to describe themselves. We are interested in the ways in which religious women have been engaging with their roles and experiences and advocating for their own rights. We want to bring together the growing body of scholarly and artistic work in an interdisciplinary context to examine the ways religious women, such as women in the Orthodox and Haredi communities, are seeking out power and upending gendered limitations, often by working within the religious system and structures. This volume draws together the scholarship on these women's labor in different spheres—the arts, the court system, and the religious community—in order to foreground the intersectional nature of religious women's feminism and to challenge the idea that abandoning her community is the only viable pathway for a devout woman who wants to engage in gender advocacy.

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When we first meet Ruchie Freier in *93Queen,* she explains what it means to be a woman within her community. "The focus of a woman is being a mother," says the lawyer (who, as we later learn, went on to become the first Hasidic woman civil court judge in New York). "Any profession for a woman or extra education is discouraged." The paradox between the clear commitment that she has to religious expectations and her educational and professional experiences offers a glimpse into the ways that Haredi women negotiate social expectations while continuing to push at them. As

she speaks, the camera follows her from place to place, allowing viewers to take in her wig (denoting her religious observance) and business suit (symbolizing her professional engagement with modernity). We see her brisk pace and her no-nonsense attitude. She talks to people on the street, rings doorbells canvassing, carries boxes. She is a bundle of energy—a physical and political powerhouse. And she boldly challenges the dual discrimination she faces, determined to achieve her goals. "The worst thing to tell me," she says, "is that I cannot do something because I am a woman and because I am a *religious* woman. *That's* the worst thing to tell me." In her car, she orders the filmmaker and crew—and by extension the audience—to "Fasten your seatbelts!" It is not only practical advice; it is a metaphor for the speed at which changes are taking place within her community.

Throughout *93Queen*, we watch Freier and her fellow EMTs overcome seemingly impassable obstacles imposed by a society that rejects the women's efforts and sees these women as competition for an all-male Hasidic EMT service. Gender, unsurprisingly, poses the greatest stumbling block in the path of success within her community. "Sometimes," Freier says as she stuffs envelopes for a fundraiser while cooking dinner, balancing her activism with her domestic duties, "I wonder why did G-d make me a woman? If he had made me a man, it would have been so much easier. . . . If I had been a *Hasidic man*, I would have had half the problems I have."[27] Although Freier explicitly recognizes the advantages of being *male*, there is never the sense that she believes in disadvantages to being a *Haredi Jew*. Her model of agency is the Hasidic man.

But Freier herself is a model of agency for many women. In the final montage of the film, women who have been part of the EMT efforts explain their desires for their own daughters to have greater opportunities, more education, and larger horizons, opinions they have arrived at as a result of their activism within Ezras Nashim. Freier is a constant advocate for change from within. Responding to the inaccuracies in Netflix's *Unorthodox*, and particularly to a scene in which the series' creators featured female EMTs arriving in Williamsburg to attempt to resuscitate Esty's grandmother, Freier wrote in an op-ed for the Orthodox news site, *Vos iz Neias*: "These EMTs were dressed in the purple vests resembling

Ezras Nashim's uniform. Unfortunately, that too is inaccurate as Ezras Nashim continues to confront incredible challenges including launching a branch in Williamsburg. While our community embodies magnanimous kindness, *Chessed*, there are areas where change is needed—real change will come from within, not from those who leave."[28]

Freier, who became the first Hasidic woman to hold public office in American history in 2016, is not the only Haredi woman with political ambitions or successes. Tvia Greenfeld, a peace activist and member of the Israeli political party Meretz, was briefly the first female Haredi Member of Knesset in 2008–2009. In 2013, Mindy Pollak, a Vishnitz Hasidic woman and food blogger who ran a local community organization with a Palestinian partner, became borough councilor for Outremont in Montreal, the first Hasidic woman to assume a political position in Quebec; she was reelected in 2017 and courted by federal parties in Canada in 2018. The same year, Adina Sash, a social media influencer known as Flatbush Girl, ran as district leader in the forty-fifth New York State Assembly, and Rezi Friedman, the daughter of a highly controversial Haredi rabbi in Belgium, ran for Antwerp's municipal office. In 2019, Michal Zernowitski shattered both political and religious expectations of Haredi women when she became a Labor candidate in Israel. Around the same time, Omer Yankelevich, who founded "Art and Faith" for Haredi women (a program that began at a flea-market gallery and grew into a center that included divisions in theater, film and media, dance, and visual arts), joined the Kaḥol Lavan party; she subsequently became the first Haredi woman cabinet minister, Minister of Diaspora Affairs, in 2020.[29] Importantly, the impact that these powerful women are having on the Jewish Orthodox establishment reaches beyond the immediate boundaries of their own communities.

In Israel, for instance, the religious authorities control many aspects of life-cycle events including marriage, divorce, and burial, a legacy from the Ottoman millet system, which led to each religious community governing its own internal community affairs about such decisions—and is distinct from criminal and civil law.[30] According to the 2010 census, only 8 percent of Israel is Haredi, with a further 12 percent considering themselves Orthodox. Yet since 1984, SHAS, a small religious party,

has been part of the government.[31] As a result, this minority faction has had control over several important ministries that impact the daily lives of Israel's citizens—religious and secular alike.[32] Its leader Eli Yishai has also served as Minister of Industry, Trade, and Labor; Minister of Internal Affairs; and Deputy Prime Minister, thereby holding significant control over governmental affairs well beyond those of a religious nature. United Torah Judaism, a coalition of two smaller Orthodox Jewish parties, has also had an outsized influence, frequently serving in the coalition government with similar inducements to its participation. Yet neither party has been willing to include women as candidates on its list, and both have argued against the participation of women in the public realm, including increased strictures on arts and culture at public events where the government appears, for fear of offending religious sensibilities.[33] In 2015, Ruth Colian formed B'Zchutan [For Their (Female) Rights], an Orthodox political party for women that ran female candidates on a mandate of Orthodox-female centered issues. They were attacked by many of the religious authorities and did not receive enough votes for a seat. Though they focused on issues of gender that were especially acute in the religious community, the negative reaction they experienced characterized the battles that all women who attempt to confront the religious establishment in Israel encounter. Understanding the power the religious authorities have in Israel, and particularly the control the Orthodox and Haredim have for approximately 80 percent of the population's life-cycle events, can help elucidate the importance that gendered advocacy can have on the lives of women who are not religious, or are not Orthodox, but whose decisions are impacted by these religious communities.

While women in Israel can challenge the religious authorities on the grounds of gender discrimination, with the legal path often being the only recourse to overturn some of the most egregious rulings against women, it is the activism of religious women within the community that has the power to create lasting change.[34] Both in Israel and in the United States, the two largest Orthodox and Haredi communities, religiously observant Jewish women are at the vanguard of broader global changes and activism inaugurated by religious women working inside their own religious communities. They

have thus often served as models for operating within the boundaries of traditional systems, transforming them from within. For example, when Israeli Jewish filmmaker Rama Burshtein's *Fill the Void*, about marriage within a traditional community, became an international hit, it served as inspiration for the first Saudi Arabian woman filmmaker Haifaa Al-Mansour, who saw ways to create a female cinematic vision under patriarchal oversight.[35]

While Haredi women filmmakers are a newer phenomenon within the mainstream, they have been involved in filmmaking within their own communities in women-only religious cinema for decades.[36] Programs in both Israel and the United States have facilitated some of this development with women-only courses, and one of the contributions to this volume provides a qualitative study of the beliefs and experiences of graduates from The Ma'aleh School of Television, Film, and the Arts in Jerusalem, aimed specifically at serving the needs of religious Jews. With the opening of Ma'aleh, as well as Torat Hachaim (running on separate days for men and women) in Yad Binyamin, and a Greenhouse program for women documentary filmmakers in Israel that is specifically focused on diversity, there has been greater support and training for religious women moving into the film industry. In the United States, Kol Neshama was founded in 2000 in Los Angeles to provide a performing arts conservatory in a "Torah-observant setting." Other organizations and networks have followed suit.

Orthodox women writers have been at the helm of magazine publishing in the United States and a feature of mainstream literary society in Israel since the 1990s, when a boom in women's writing knocked the traditional nationalist-male writers off the bestsellers list for an extended period.[37] This has led to more than two decades of popular writing.[38] Orthodox women dominate the children's literature market, and visual artists have had their work featured in exhibits. In 2017, the Mishkan Museum of Art in Ein Harod created one such exhibition: Tsenu Ureno. It was ironically named after a sixteenth-century Yiddish-language text with biblical homilies that for hundreds of years was the only religious education provided for women. That same year, Noa Lea Cohn, curator of the ArtShelter Gallery in Jerusalem, put on an exhibit called "Popthodox," featuring men and women's Haredi pop art, including the cover art for this issue.

In the modern dance world, there has also been a good deal of change taking place. In the last decade, Noga and Nehara, two companies of all-female Orthodox dancers, have emerged in Israel, with several more informal groups. Opposition to such activities comes from Orthodox injunctions against men seeing women dance or sing in public, and more directly attack women for behaving immodestly. But despite these strident objections, the women have frequently found ways to organize in all-female settings, or to see themselves modeling a form of performance for a mixed public, thereby bringing religion into the public space. While the choreography is often focused on piety, religious themes, and devotion, the companies also showcase practical advantages of participating as Orthodox women in Orthodox dance troupes. Marrying young and having several children need not, at these companies, derail the women's dance careers; the women dance well into their pregnancies and bring their babies and toddlers to rehearsals. Costumes are generally more modest, with longer sleeves and hemlines, and "dancers adhere to the strictures of religious observance, keeping bodies covered with long-sleeve, conservative costumes and movements that honor a culture of modesty; married women also cover their hair."[39] Rehearsals and performances do not take place on religious holidays or the Sabbath. A contributor to this volume also discusses the impact of the Jerusalem Center for the Performing Arts, formerly known as Bnos Miriam, as a venue for Haredi engagement in performance by and for women. The growth of this cultural movement and the increasing number of groups and dancers participating demonstrates a resiliency among a wide range of Orthodox women to be able to combine art and religion.

At present, Orthodox women artists of all kinds are responding to the biggest current issue affecting the world: COVID-19. Rachel Elitzur, the director of Ma'aleh's Haredi women's stream, is creating a documentary made up of a montage of footage from people's windows and phone calls with loved ones around the world, to establish a universal, and yet personal, mosaic of feeling. She is far from the only one finding inspiration, and a call to leadership, during this crisis. "In the vein of viral videos of singing neighbors on balconies in Italy, Spain, or France," reports ethnomusicologist Jessica Roda, "Orthodox female artists are also responding

to the crisis through music and imagery. They continue their women-and-girls-only performances via live concerts on Instagram and Zoom, and by releasing new covers and singles (take, for example, Dobby Baum's 'It is meant to be' for women and girls)." Roda worries that the primary stories of the Haredi community during the pandemic have been focusing on Haredi men's refusal to comply with public health officials (continuing to participate in minyanim, for instance) and the launch of Netflix's *Unorthodox*, featuring the downtrodden, oppressed women in these communities. Instead, Roda wants to highlight the vital roles Orthodox women artists have: "They have used this moment to constantly engage with their online viewers, specifically about the pandemic, the challenges of quarantine, and the need to stay at home. With thousands of followers—and more to come—they are responding to this moment by reinforcing a sense of community. Crucially, they are reinventing their religiosity using technology and media. In doing so, they challenge narratives that imagine them as silent members of their religious society."[40]

Despite the growth of religious women's presence in all facets of life both within the religious world and in the public sphere, their experiences and activism remain complicated by their identification with religion. As the women have become increasingly educated and powerful, reactionary efforts have heightened restrictions on their behavior and appearance. It is wrong to think that these religious women experience a linear progression from restriction to liberation, or that the past was more religious while the present is less so. Even as this volume seeks to shed light on current trends among Orthodox women's feminism, we recognize that these changes are often cyclical in nature and occur alongside a conservative backlash against women defying male control.

* * *

This volume seeks to bring attention to efforts by women within traditionally religious communities to push against the system and advance their lives as religious women. By bringing together scholarship on expressions of religious feminist engagement, we hope to both raise awareness of this phenomena and spark a conversation about the ranges of expression

that feminism can take even within traditionally patriarchal spaces. Our collection is not limited to the work of academics; alongside scholarly articles, we have included reflections by religious women practitioners and clergy who consider the experiences and challenges they encounter: Maharat Miriam Udel tells of her long wait and sheer joy in becoming a Jewish clergywoman, which she likens to climbing aboard a tender that skims across the sea. Orthodox comedian Rachel Creeger shares with readers her road to *frum* [pious] funniness. Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt relates how, in being both rebbetzin and journalist, she has learned to develop, in the words of Eleanor Roosevelt, "skin as tough as rhinoceros hide," while Paula Eiselt charts the complexity of making *93Queen* and the way the women EMTs' struggles mirrored her own.

Rose Waldman's research on female speakers in stringent Hasidic communities in New York opens this issue's section of scholarly articles. In "Women's Voices in Contemporary Hasidic Communities," Waldman skillfully analyzes both English and Yiddish texts to make her claims about women's refusal to be silenced. While female lecturers present exclusively to female audiences in these communities, Waldman complicates the notion of an apparently strict gender segregation in her analysis of recorded lectures (on cassettes and later CDs, hotlines, and now apps), listened to by men and women alike. As she explains "[w]omen are inserting their voices and viewpoints in the Hasidic communal arena, even on matters of morality and spirituality," even among men. The influence of women's voices is even stronger in print culture. Hasidic women are active leaders in the Haredi publishing industry: they establish, write, and edit magazines, which function both as creative outlets for the makers and sources of information and spiritual sustenance for the readers. Some of the women at the helm of the magazine publishing industry, such as Ruth Lichtenstein, editor of *Hamodia*, founder of *Binah*, and a prolific writer, are also making inroads in other areas of education and culture. Lichtenstein, for example, spearheaded *Project Witness*, a wide-ranging educational Holocaust resource center; Sarah Jungreisz, founder of the Yiddish-language magazine *Maalos*, has brought to the fore issues of mental health long suppressed in her (Satmar) community. Finally, Waldman offers insights into another version

of the female voice in Hasidic society: the singing voice of musical theater, a rich, layered world fostered in summer camps and schools, leading to live performances, party acts, and the production of DVDs.

Similarly, in "(In)visible Women: Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Women's Faces and the Internet," Helene Sinnreich examines women's voices—and *faces*—as she explores the relationship between Haredi women's agency and the internet. Although internet use is widely discouraged by rabbinical leaders, in an era in which women's faces are being erased from Haredi publications, women are defiantly going online to reclaim their subjectivity. Like Waldman, Sinnreich reminds readers that there is nothing monolithic about Haredi Judaism. Sinnreich, thus, breaks her analysis into three sections to examine different communities and their employment of non-traditional channels to defy new strictures that limit women's agency, develop their leadership, and present themselves to both the women of their own communities as well as those far outside of them. While her analysis of certain Hasidic groups (Satmar, Belzer, Skverer) overlaps with Waldman's, Sinnreich also looks to the Right and the Left: to the "Taliban women" founded by Keren Bruria, whose extreme piety exceeds and thus challenges even the severest guidance of male leaders (not unlike the Muslim women's mosque movement explored by Mahmood in *Politics of Piety*), and to the most liberal, progressive of Hasidic communities, Chabad.

Building on Waldman's discussion of musical productions and Sinnreich's examination of the band Bulletproof Stockings, two of the articles in our collection focus exclusively on the performative cultural industry of Haredi women: Heather Munro's article "Navigating Change: Agency, Identity, and Embodiment in Haredi Women's Dance and Theater" and Valeria Seigelshifer and Tova Hartman's "The Emergence of Israeli Orthodox Women Filmmakers."

Munro confronts prejudice and assumptions about women within the religious community and ideas about their capacity for self-directed empowerment, arguing that "Haredi women are the target of much outside speculation and are often framed as passive participants in their own oppression, without agency, in need of enlightened, feminist rescuers." Munro used ethnographic fieldwork conducted within the Haredi

community, interviewing women involved in the performing arts (in women-for-women productions). Her article focuses on the work of the Rachel Factor Dance School in creating a performance culture inside a Haredi framework and the play *The Mask She Wears*. What she found was a dynamic scene that used art not in opposition to, but in support of Haredi values, while giving women a voice and a creative outlet within community-sanctioned boundaries. Yet as Munro shows, these boundaries are constantly being renegotiated within the wider community as liberal progressive ideas and values continue to make incursions into what often appears from the outside to be a closed world, and these demands require an ongoing process of adaptation and engagement.

As with Munro's ethnographic findings, the move to produce culture does not simply signify a shift from the Orthodox world to the non-Orthodox one but instead provides a platform for negotiating the complexity and challenges of a life as a Torah-observant woman. Through in-depth interviews with twenty-six Orthodox women filmmakers, Seigelshifer and Hartman offer an intimate portrait of the aesthetic and religious motivations of a new generation of filmmakers in Israel who have graduated from The Ma'aleh School of Film and Television. For these women, there was a profound shift in the need to overcome their socialization to silence themselves and instead find their *I*, the personal voice that they wanted to communicate. According to Seigelshifer and Hartman, "Commitments expressed by the Orthodox Jewish women filmmakers are not confined to the self but include commitments to family and community, and, yes, to the Woman of Valor (i.e., to the traditional values of Orthodox femininity)." Thus, rather than overcoming their upbringings or choosing one correct path, these women used film to find and negotiate their individual and relational attitude to both art and community.

Literature has a longer history of representing religious women by female artists than many other arts, and over the course of our research careers, we have both investigated this realm at length.[41] Yet it is clear that much of the recent scholarship—and popular press—have focused on the "off-the-*derekh*" narrative, the stories of those who leave.[42] Less well known are the many stories of those who arrive, or, as Orthodoxy prefers to call

it, "return."[43] Efraim Sicher's essay, "Recovering the Kerchief: Returning to Judaism in Contemporary Israeli Religious Women's Fiction," on Israeli novels about women adopting religious observance, becoming *baalot teshuvah*, reflects a change in perspective. Sicher focuses on the novels of Noa Yaron-Dayan, Michal Govrin, and Emunah Elon, which, he argues, may be "occasionally didactic or stylistically flawed," but significantly, "do not shy away from the doubts and pitfalls on the road to faith." For instance, reading Yaron-Dayan's novel *Mekimi* (later made into a series on Amazon Prime), Sicher notes that the authors show "how the process of *teshuvah* [repentance] runs up against preconceptions and prejudgments, especially fear of something unknown that might change the familiar routine of secular life or challenge politically correct opinions." Furthermore, these narratives often symbolically highlight the role of modest dress and women's head coverings. If "off-the-*derekh*" tales like *Unorthodox* emphasize the *uncovering* of a woman's head (not unlike the Muslim women's "veiled bestsellers," as Gillian Whitlock has dubbed them) as a way of depicting freedom, the *teshuvah* novels Sicher analyzes foreground the *covering* of a woman's head as a visually evocative demonstration of empowered choice.

David Sperber examines visual artists' critical engagement with rabbinical laws, contending that any examination of religious feminism must include the art world, "an alternative field of action." Sperber's article, "Contemporary Orthodox Jewish Feminist Art in Israel: Institutional Criticism of the Rabbinical Establishment," focuses on the Israeli Orthodox Jewish artists Hagit Molgan, who interrogates the laws surrounding menstruation; Nurit Jacobs-Yinon and Hila Karbelnikov-Pax, who take as their subject of inquiry the ritual immersion of female converts; and Andi Arnovitz, who underscores the dangers of extreme modesty decrees. The artists incorporate mainstream (which is to say, non-religious) feminist art practices but adapt them for religious purposes. For example, we can find Carolee Schneemann's visual experiments evoked in Molgan's art. Schneeman's groundbreaking *Blood Work Diary* boldly featured menstrual blood, subverting the cultural taboos surrounding it. Molgan's *My Patchwork Quilt* comprises stained cloths that represent the *bedika* cloths Orthodox women insert into their vaginas and sometimes

send to rabbis to review as part of *Taharat Hamishpacha* [Jewish family purity laws], which determine a wife's sexual availability to her husband. Other artists are inspired directly from the religious context in which they live: Jacobs-Yinon's *Midrash of the Female Convert*, emphasizing the voyeurism of the *mikvah*, a violation of the very modesty the rabbinical authorities claim to uphold, indeed acts as a "contemporary feminist midrash." *Midrash of the Female Convert* led directly to change: as of 2016, male religious judges involved in conversions are no longer permitted to stand above the *mikvah* while a woman immerses herself in it. Sperber suggests that there are even greater implications to Jacobs-Yinon's work—such as the need for female judges in religious courts. Read collectively, the artists' works constitute not only a rejection of religious patriarchal laws and practices that ensure men's control of women's bodies, but moreover a "broad radical critique of the rabbinical establishment in Israel."

Highlighting the legal limitations that remain for women in the Jewish community in Israel, Tanya Zion-Waldoks, Ronit Irshai, and Bana Shoughry consider the groundbreaking appointment of a Qadi [a judge in the Shari`a courts]. "The First Female Qadi in Israel's Shari`a (Muslim) Courts: Nomos and Narrative" traces the impact that women activists had on fighting legal, political, and public battles for such a historic milestone and recognizes "the Jewish ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) patriarchal forces . . . fear such an accomplishment by Muslim women would encourage and enable Jewish women's struggles for gender equality in the parallel rabbinic court system." The scholars also consider the multiple conflicting forces on Muslim women's identity: as part of a Muslim minority, the women have seen the Shari`a courts as a symbol of national pride, but as women, they have experienced an intersectional struggle against their own community's larger (and not necessarily female-centered) interests. As an exemplar of the contemporary battle for political and legal agency within traditional religious patriarchal structures, the struggle for a Muslim female judge can provide a new model for Jewish women looking for women's voices on the *Beit Din*, the Jewish court of law.

Our front cover features *My Marilyn Monroe 1*, a work of pop art by Yehudith Levy (a pseudonym), which plays with the image of Schenirer,

founder of the Bais Yaakov movement. For our concluding piece, Noa Lea Cohn, curator of the Popthodox exhibit at The ArtShelter Gallery in Jerusalem, explains the significance of this work. Levy's treatment of Schenirer is part of a recent wave of attention directed at a woman who has become a significant icon within Hasidic female circles.[44]

The pieces in this volume not only share the subject matter of Orthodox women's feminisms, but also repeatedly engage in the question of women's silencing within their communities, whether real or perceived, and the journeys on which many Orthodox women have ventured in order to find and present their voices. The opening up of these new directions in women's activism and artistic exploration suggests the porous nature of Orthodox communities as they are increasingly influenced by liberal feminist ideals, even as these are retranslated through religious and social lenses that accord with personal and communal values. The eruv is not an iron curtain for observant women, but instead, it is a way to resolve the tension of living Jewishly in a secular world, and a metaphor for female engagement politically, socially, and artistically within the boundaries of a religious community.

NOTES

With thanks to Susannah Heschel and Laura S. Levitt for their kind and generous comments on an earlier draft of this introduction. We are grateful for their knowledge, guidance, and wisdom in this and all things.

1. See Harris *Warriors, Witches*, 91–122; Skinazi, *Women of Valor*, 1–29. Ezras Nashim provides a service that allows women to maintain their *tznius*—their religiously mandated modesty—as they no longer have to physically expose their bodies to men in situations such as childbirth and miscarriage. Yet rather than encourage a service that is in explicit accordance with traditional values, many Haredi men have strongly contested it, refusing to acknowledge women's professional abilities.
2. For a discussion of the development of Jewish feminist theology, see Benjamin, "Tracing the Contours," 11–31.

3. Overall, "Feminism and Atheism," 235.
4. Poniewozik, "Critic's Pick."
5. Ibid.
6. See Vizel, "Unorthodox"; Seidman, "Telling the OTD Tale."
7. Such narratives abound for Orthodox Jews as well as Mormons, Muslims, and other conservative religious streams. Tara Westover's 2018 memoir *Educated*, chronicling her end-of-days Mormon family's refusal to educate their daughter, for example, was number one on the *New York Times* best-seller list. For a scholarly discussion and comparison of Mormon and Muslim "escape narratives," see Gorman, *Captivity and Conflict*.
8. For a discussion of the literary "portrait of the artist as a young female *frummer*" set free through romantic love, with a focus on Ragen and Carner's novels, see Skinazi, *Women of Valor*, 179–87. Regarding cinematic representations, see the same for a discussion of *A Price Above Rubies*, 157–60, and Harris's *Warriors, Witches, Whores*, 91–122 for an analysis of Amos Gitai's *Kadosh* and the portrayal of religious women in Israeli cinema.
9. See El-Or, "Paradoxes and Social Boundaries"; Biale, *Women and Jewish Law*; Baskin, "The Separation of Jewish Women"; Baum, Hyman, and Michel, *The Jewish Woman*; Hyman, "The Other Half"; Plaskow, *Standing Again*; Priesand, *Judaism and the New Woman*; and Swidler, *Women in Judaism*.
10. See Zion-Waldoks, "Politics of Devoted Resistance"; Avishai, "'Doing Religion.'"
11. See Shubowitz, "Centripetal and Centrifugal."
12. See Shilo, "A Religious Orthodox."
13. See Levine, *Mystics, Mavericks, and Merrymakers*; Fader, *Mitzvah Girls*; and Taragin-Zeller, "Between Modesty and Beauty" and "Modesty for Heaven's Sake."
14. See Joseph, "Women in Orthodoxy."
15. The Jewish Free School in London, established in 1732 as the Talmud Torah of the Great Synagogue of London, was once the largest school in the world at four thousand pupils. Originally established for the community's orphaned boys, by the early nineteenth century it was already admitting girls. In France, Jewish education for women developed particularly under the auspices of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, and during the colonial period, their system of

schools would offer Jewish girls the opportunity to learn across the Middle East and North Africa. In Eastern Europe, the aim to provide women with a formal Jewish education did not develop until the early twentieth century; it was a response to the social and historical modernization taking place in Europe that challenged traditional Jewish life.

16. In 1998, Kolech ("Her Voice") was founded as the first Orthodox Jewish feminist organization in Israel. Along with Itim and Bar-Ilan University, they were part of the legal case fighting for the right of women to sit the Jewish Law exams.
17. Graetz, "Women and Religion," 17.
18. See Brettschneider, *Jewish Feminism*. It should also be noted that a number of the victories of feminists within Judaism have come alongside advocates for LGBT rights.
19. Ferziger, "Sanctuary for the Specialist," 3.
20. Ettinger, "When Rachelle Fraenkel Recited the Kaddish."
21. Ferziger, "Sanctuary for the Specialist," 7–8.
22. Ibid., 19.
23. Ibid.
24. www.chabad.org.
25. https://www.chabad.org/theJewishWoman/default_cdo/jewish/The-Jewish-Woman.htm.
26. Sharon, "State to Give Official Accreditation."
27. Emphasis added.
28. Freier, "Sharing My Chassidic Perspective."
29. See Suissa Ben Ami, "About Art. "
30. Without civil marriage and divorce in Israel, and with all cemeteries under the control of religious authorities (or the military), there are no civil mechanisms for acts that religious authorities reject. For example, same-sex and interfaith marriages cannot be performed as legally binding acts in Israel. In an attempt to mitigate the legal ramifications of such marriages on other issues such as inheritance, Israel does recognize marriages performed outside the country.
31. In Israel, the proportional representation system means that there are many small political parties who work together to create a government coalition.

32. These have included the Religious Services Ministries who have used the platform to enforce Haredi religious positions on cradle-to-grave activities, kosher supervision, and religious spaces such as synagogues and ritual baths. It has also at times controlled the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Welfare and Labor, and recently the Ministry of Health.
33. On the basis of *Kol Isha*, women's singing has been restricted in national events, and on one notable occasion, the Haredi Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem, Haim Miller, and two religious parties staged a protest that led to the censoring of the Batsheva dance company's costumes at an event for the fiftieth anniversary of statehood. Ohad Naharin, the artistic director and choreographer, resigned in response to government officials' demands that performers not be allowed to appear in shorts and undershirts. Forced to make the performers wear long johns or risk losing state-sponsored funding, Naharin quit and became the face of anti-censorship protests that followed.
34. See Allison Kaplan Sommer and Dahlia Lithwick's articles in *The New Republic* in August 2013.
35. Al-Mansour's first film, *Wadjda* (2012), is the story of a girl who wants to ride a bicycle—which is against the rules of modesty. In *The Perfect Candidate* (2020), Al-Mansour depicts a woman who runs for political office in Saudi Arabia, shattering local taboos.
36. For a history of the Orthodox women's film industry in Israel, see Vinig's *Orthodox Cinema* (in Hebrew only); in the United States, see Skinazi, *Women of Valor*, 174–216.
37. See Furstenberg, "Orthodox Israeli Women Novelists."
38. See Arad, "In Israel's Haredi Literary World."
39. See "All Female Dance Troupes."
40. See Roda, "Hasidic Female Artists Respond."
41. See Harris, who notes a shift between the third generation of American Jewish women writers and what she identifies as a fourth generation in the attitude toward religiosity in "From Feminist to Housewife and Back Again." See Skinazi, *Women of Valor* (passim).
42. See, for instance, Skinazi, "Are Head Coverings?" and *Women of Valor*, 30–74; Patt, "A Guide for the Heretic"; Lang and Cappell, *Off the Derech*; Newfield, *Degrees of Separation*.

43. Sociologists have examined this phenomenon. See Kaufman, *Rachel's Daughters*; Davidman, *Tradition*; Benor, *Becoming Frum*. Davidman has also written about Hasidim who have gone off-the-*derekh*; see Davidman, *Becoming*.
44. Naomi Seidman published *Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov Movement* (2019), and Haredi scholar Leslie Ginsparg Klein wrote an illustrated children's book about her, along with Ann Koffsky, entitled *Sarah Builds a School* (2018). And in the conclusion of her film *Covered Up* (2018), Ma'aleh's Elitzur uses Schenirer as a symbol of hope for Haredi women. After struggling with her role as a divorcée in a community that elevates marriage above almost all else for women, Elitzur and her friend muse that God might not consider marriage and motherhood to be the calling for *every* woman. "Take Sarah Schenirer, for example," says Elitzur. "She didn't have kids, she was divorced, and she established the Beit Yaakov schools . . . But they don't tell us that at Beit Yaakov." Both an educator herself, as well as a filmmaker, Elitzur sees in Schenirer God's argument to some women, "You don't have to be a mother, you don't have to marry a scholar. Your existence is okay, too."

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